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ABSTRACT

Fiske and her colleagues have argued that impression formation begins with the perceiver's attempt to match a new target person's personal attributes to those that characterize a familiar social category in memory. Results of a study testing this model found general support for it, but results for subjects who saw partial matches (the target was neither a good nor poor representation of a particular category) were less clear cut. This affect produced in the partial match conditions may be a result of concerns regarding the interaction itself, and thus it could be expected that high self-monitors would experience more negative affect in the partial match conditions because the partial match does not provide the high self-monitor enough information to guide his behavior. This study was designed to replicate the "schema-triggered affect" and to test this hypothesis on the effects of self-monitoring in the partial match conditions in terms of subject's concerns over the nature of the impending interpersonal interaction. High and low self-monitoring female subjects (N=8) were shown profiles of male targets whom they expected to date. Results indicated that high self-monitors evidenced less positive affect in the conditions where the personality characteristics and the appearance characteristics were in conflict. (ABL)

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Schema-Triggered Affect and Situational Concerns

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Abstract

The present study was designed to replicate the "schema-triggered affect" effect (Fiske, 1982), and to test a hypothesis that could account for affective response in the partial match conditions in terms of subject's concerns over the nature of the impending interpersonal interaction. High and low self-monitoring female subjects were shown profiles of male targets who they expected to date. Results indicated that high self-monitors evidenced less positive affect in the conditions where the personality characteristics and the appearance characteristics were in conflict. The results are discussed in terms of high self-monitoring individuals' concern over interacting in the impending meeting.

Schema-Triggered Affect and Situational Concerns

Fiske and her colleagues (e.g., Fiske, 1982; Fiske & Pavelchak, 1986) have argued that impression formation begins with the perceiver's attempt to match a new target person's personal attributes to those that characterize a familiar social category in memory. If the target individual is a good representative of a particular category, then the individual will be attributed the "category-based" affective impression of that particular classification. Results of a study testing this hypothesis (i.e., Fiske, Beattie, & Milberg, 1981), indicated general support for Fiske's model. However, less clear-cut and more confusing are the findings for those subjects who saw partial matches (i.e., the target individual was neither a good nor poor representation of a particular category -- a partial schematic match).

Situational influences

Why should partial matches evoke such variability in affect? We propose that the affect experienced by the subjects in the partial match conditions was elicited by concerns over the nature of the impending social interaction. In the partial match conditions, subjects had ambiguous information concerning their "dates" and as such, may not have had an available script in memory to guide their behavior (e.g., what to say, what to expect, and how to act) in the impending interaction.

Self-monitoring

One approach that could be used to test this notion would be to identify individuals for whom such conflicting situational pressures would be likely to be high (Snyder & Ickes, 1985). High and low self-monitoring individuals seem to be ideal candidates that possess such concerns. According to self-monitoring theory (Snyder, 1987), high self-monitoring individuals typically strive

to appear to be the type of person called for in a given social situation. In contrast, low self-monitors are less responsive to situational and interpersonal cues of social appropriateness.

If the affect produced in the partial match conditions is a result of concerns regarding the interaction itself, it might be expected that high self-monitors would experience more negative affect in the partial match conditions (versus the good or poor representation conditions) because the partial match condition does not provide the high self-monitor with enough information to guide his or her behavior (i.e., to present him or herself in a socially appropriate manner) in the impending interaction. In comparison, low self-monitors would not be expected to experience as much negative affect in the partial match conditions because they are not as concerned about the nature of the situational press.

Method

Subjects and Design

Eighty female undergraduates participated in two experimental sessions for extra credit towards their introductory psychology course grade. In the first session, subjects participated in small groups of approximately six persons, whereas in the second session all subjects participated individually. Based on their responses to stimulus materials collected in the first session, subjects were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions of a 2 (dating prototype's personality; good representation or poor representation) x 2 (dating prototype's physical appearance; good representation or poor representation) factorial design.

Procedure

Session 1. In the first session, subjects completed the 18-item version of the Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). On the basis of a median split, half the participants were classified as high self-monitors (scores > 10) and half as low self-monitors (scores < 9).

Participants also completed the "Princeton Personality Inventory" (Fiske et al., 1981) for a past romantic and a non-romantic partner. This measure asked subjects to rate a past romantic partner and someone who they knew but whom they would not want to have a romantic relationship. The ratings of the past romantic partner served as the stimulus for the good representation of a dating partner's personality and the ratings of the person who the subject did not wish to date served as the stimulus for the poor representation of a dating partner's personality. Subjects were then given a booklet consisting of 43, 2.5 x 3.0 cm photographs of males of varied appearance. They were told to indicate two male targets, one male who reminded them of a past dating partner and one who reminded them of someone they knew but would not want to date. The male chosen as the subject's "type of guy" served as the good representation of a dating partner and the male chosen as not the subject's "type of guy" served as the poor representation of a dating partner. Subjects were then asked to return approximately 2 to 3 weeks later for a brief coffee or soda date.

Stimulus Materials. Based on the information collected in the first session, individualized profiles of potential dates were constructed for use in the second session. A sample target profile is shown in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Session 2. At the start of the second session, subjects completed the Affects Balance Scale (ABS; DeRogatis, 1975) with the instructions to "... tell us whether you feel these feelings now." The ABS is a self-report measure that assesses the difference or "balance" between positive and negative affect. Subjects were then shown a personality profile and photograph of their date.

Then subjects were asked to complete the ABS scale again, this time with the instructions, ". . . We would like you to tell us how your partner is likely to make you feel. Please indicate the degree to which you will feel the emotions during your date." Subjects were then asked for their evaluations of their dates. This measure included a manipulation check of the personality and appearance manipulations.

Results

Manipulation checks. Confirming the effectiveness of the personality and physical appearance manipulations, subjects who received a good representation of a dating partner's personality ($M = 5.17$) were more satisfied with the target's personality than those who received a poor representation ($M = 3.08$), $p < .0001$. And subjects who received a good representation of a dating partner's physical appearance ($M = 5.00$) were more satisfied with their date's appearance in comparison to those who received a poor representation ($M = 2.30$), $p < .0001$.

Substantive analysis. The major hypotheses were tested in the form of a 2 (self-monitoring; high, low) x 2 (dating prototype's physical appearance; good or poor representation) x 2 (dating prototype's personality; good or poor representation) ANOVA on the difference scores (pre minus post mood). Because the post-mood measure showed substantially more variance than the pre-mood measure, these scores were standardized before the difference measure was taken. Means from this analysis are shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Appearance was a much more powerful determinant of emotional response than personality. The main effect of physical appearance was highly significant, $F(1,71) = 6.46$, $p < .01$, showing

that subjects who received a good representation of a dating prototype's physical appearance (M = .20) experienced more positive affect than those who received a poor representation (M = -.20). Subjects who received a good representation of a dating prototype's personality (M = .13) did show somewhat more positive affect than those who received a poor representation (M = -.13), however this difference was not significant, $F(1,71) < 1$. Note that the difference in the affect produced by the physical appearance and the personality manipulations does not appear to be a function of differential strength of the manipulations. Manipulation checks showed that the personality manipulation was strong, yet it had little effect on mood.

There was only one other significant effect in this analysis. The three-way interaction between representation of a dating prototype's physical appearance, representation of a dating prototype's personality, and self-monitoring was significant, $F(1,71) = 5.91$, $p < .02$. We had expected that high (versus low) self-monitors would experience more negative affect in the partial match conditions, because they would be more affected by the situational press of the upcoming encounter. To test this hypothesis directly, the three-way interaction was examined by studying the effects of the personality representations and physical appearance representations separately for high and low self-monitors.

For low self-monitors, both the main effect of personality, $\underline{F}(1,36) = 3.77$, $\underline{p} < .06$, and of appearance, $\underline{F}(1,36) = 4.86$, $\underline{p} < .04$, were significant, while the personality x appearance interaction was not. For high self-monitors neither the appearance nor the personality main effect was significant (both $\underline{F}$'s < 1), while the interaction term was, $\underline{F}(1,36) = 3.87$, $\underline{p} = .05$. The pattern of means for these subjects provides support for the general hypothesis. High self-monitors experienced less positive affect in the partial match conditions ($\underline{M}$'s = -.43, -.24) in comparison to the good representation ($\underline{M}$ = .30) and the poor representation ($\underline{M}$ = .20)

conditions. This pattern is predicted by the hypothesis that high self-monitors would be especially concerned with the nature of the upcoming encounter in conditions where there were conflicting cues.

Why did high self-monitors experience positive affect in the poor representation conditions? Our explanation is that these subjects felt comfortable with the upcoming situation, even though they expected it to be negative. Because the target was unsuitable on both dimensions, there was no question of how to respond. Thus for these subjects, comfort in the form of knowing how to behave had a greater influence on affect than the match between the target and the existing prototypes.

Discussion

Despite the fact that perceivers did attend to both aspects of the target, their mood was only influenced by the physical appearance representations. The results of this study also support the hypothesis that affect experienced in interpersonal encounters is at least partly a function of individuals' concerns over the nature of the impending interaction. High self-monitors, but not low self-monitors, experienced negative affect in the partial match conditions. This was expected to the extent that high self-monitors were concerned with the nature of the upcoming interaction, and were not given clear cues of how to behave. As expected, low self-monitors were not influenced by this partial match, presumably because it produced less apprehension for these subjects. In sum, accurate prediction of the outcome of initial interactions requires attention to the interaction among perceiver characteristics, target characteristics, and the perceiver's perception of the interaction situation.

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Table 1

Mood as a Function of Personality, Appearance, and Self-monitoring

	High self-monitors		Low self-monitors	
Physical Appearance	Good Representation	Poor Representation	Good Representation	Poor Representation
Personality				
Good Rep.	.30	-.42	.34	.31
Poor Rep.	-.24	.20	.39	-.87

Note. n = 10 per cell.

Figure 1. Sample Profile of a Potential Dating Partner.